



DATUK
DR JOHN
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NATIONAL DAY

LET OUR HEARTS FLUTTER WITH ONENESS



As the flags unfurl on Merdeka Day, so too let our hearts with the unity cemented on that first day

NO other than this newspaper has sounded the first clarion call signalling the start of a reflection of what Merdeka truly means for this nation.

As the 62nd anniversary of independence approaches, we can expect to find the national flag displayed proudly outside business premises and homes.

Taxis and cars, and even motorcycles, will adorn mini-flags atop their windcreens and handle-bars. But as this newspaper asks, is the celebration all about fluttering flags? Or should they signify something more profound? Seniors who, as youngsters following their parents, had witnessed the raising of the national flag, even as the British one was lowered at Dataran Merdeka at the stroke of midnight Aug 31, 1957, will recall the elation they felt and the goosebumps they sensed.

Although they knew that a nation was born, they hardly had an inkling of the trajectory of this new nation.

Caught up in the euphoria of the moment, they might not have envisaged the tremendous economic progress that the nation has enjoyed since then.

This one thing they would have sensed — the great unity across people of all hues. These people were only conscious of the oneness among all Malaysians.

The elements that now fray the edges of the tapestry of unity, which our founding fathers had so deftly weaved, had not then reared their ugly head. Our founding father, the late Tunku Abdul Rahman, further tightened the knots of unity in this fabric of nationhood.

In his prescience of what might befall a divided nation, he had



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always reminded the young nation: "We are all Malaysians."

That is the bond that unites us. Let us always remember that unity is our fundamental strength as a people and as a nation.

Sadly, these youngsters who shouted at the top of their voices and cried their hearts out, "Merdeka, Merdeka!" with their parents then, now reminisce that historic occasion with nostalgia and a tinge of despondency.

They sense a nation becoming increasingly polarised. Could it be that this feeling of drifting apart is a mere aberration occasioned by political ructions that drown out sane and tolerant voices across society?

Or, could it be that because our politics is largely organised communally, we bicker incessantly more about our parochial interests rather than caring for the in-

terests of all? We need to guard ourselves from these discordant voices. We have many challenges ahead. The economy is softening.

The fourth industrial revolution is at our doorsteps threatening jobs. Climate change and pollution have affected our health and that of our children. The nation reels under the pressure of cost of living. And as a nation we are growing old and becoming fully urbanised.

Amid this sea of tumultuous change, we cannot afford to dissipate our energy in endless political rhetoric that destroys the national psyche.

We need to galvanise our strength to create a nation that enjoys peace and prosperity. We need to redouble our efforts to save our land from pollution and leave a sustainable economy for

posterity. And we should sow great tolerance towards all.

But tolerance alone is not enough if it means little more than leaving one another alone. That only leads to indifference, not understanding. Tolerance will neither bridge the gulfs between us nor pull us away from racial isolation.

We need to resolve our differences with love. The love that we must nurture is one that seeks the good of others. That kind of love is tough love. It is loving your neighbour as yourself.

And who is my neighbour? Lord Atkin, a UK House of Lords judge, once offered an answer: "Persons who are so closely and directly affected by my act that I ought reasonably to have them in contemplation."

We have for long bowed before mammon. We must now realise that such noble virtues as love and friendship cannot be bought.

And so, as our nation celebrates its 62nd anniversary, we must dedicate ourselves to fortifying the good foundation laid by our founding fathers.

We must never take our unity for granted. We should keep marching on to the land similar to what Dr Martin Luther King Jr. envisaged, a land where each person would be judged by the content of his character, rather than the colour of his skin until, "justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream".

So, as we reflect on what Merdeka means, we need to heed the wise Tunku's exhortation at the birth of our nation: "We must each always think first of Malaysia, of the national need and least of ourselves... Everyone must try to help and see that the people are one-minded, with loyalty and one aim, to make Malaysia — the land we love — a happy abode for all of us."

As the flags flutter on Merdeka Day, so too let our hearts flutter with the oneness that was cemented on that first day. Happy Merdeka Day!

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